

# Possum News

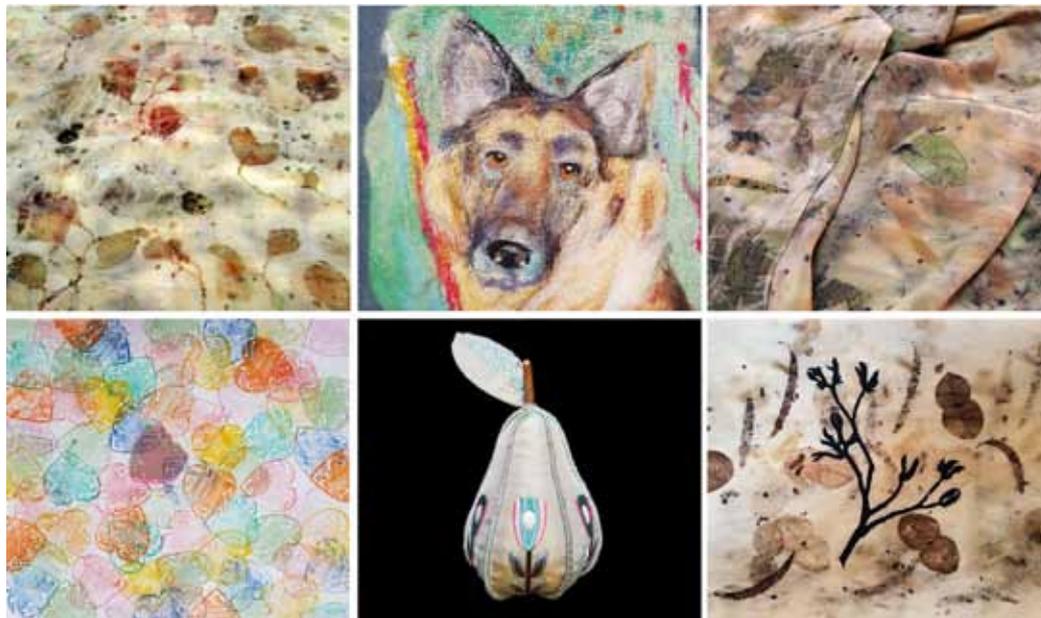
The Quarterly Newsletter for Kurrara Designs



October 2016: Issue #4

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- Workshop News
- Diary of Events



## Next Issue (Jan 17)

- Exhibition Review
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- Workshop News
- Diary of Events

## Introduction to Possum News

*Hi Everyone*

*The last few months have raced by and have been filled with exhibitions and craft shows of various sorts and I've had fun going along to some of them. Firstly, thanks to everyone who came along to the Peninsula Quilters and Patchworkers August Quilt-In. It was a fun day with great speakers and I was thrilled with the response to my hand-dyed fabrics and threads and hope all of you who took some home with you have enjoyed using them.*

*Some of the exhibition highlights over the last few months have been the Degas: A New Vision Exhibition in September at the National Gallery of Victoria and also Making the Australian Quilt (which is still on at The Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square). Also currently showing at the NGV is Italian Jewels: Bulgari Style with a stunning range of pieces from the dolce vita era; the so-called golden age of Bulgari. This is serious bling, beautifully showcased and documented with images of the famous Hollywood stars who wore it.*

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*If you're into textile bling, some of Kylie Minogue's stage creations are on display at the Melbourne Arts Centre at the moment and well worth a look. If you can't make it to the City however, in November, the Peninsula Arts Society Textile Group will have their annual Christmas display in the studio foyer, just after the Spring Art Show and it's all about glitter, glamour and femme fatales! From felt, to paper, from velour to lace and tinsel - this year we're putting on the glitz for Spring and Summer! I'll be talking more about some of the above exhibitions next time and sharing some of the collection images with you.*

*This month, I've been dyeing more scarves for the Royal Botanic Gardens in Cranbourne, for their Kangaroo Paw Celebration in November. All the spring foliage is looking good at the moment, ready for my Beginners' Natural Dyeing Workshops next month. I'll be finalising numbers for the workshops shortly, so there is still some time to enrol if you haven't yet done so and are interested in coming along. An advanced course is also planned for January 2017.*

*The last paper crafting workshop for 2016 will have a jolly, nostalgic Christmas theme and there will be a variety of goodies to play with, some of which were acquired at the recent Paperific Show, which was another great day of inspiration and ideas. If you're into home-made Christmases, this workshop will be a fun hands-on creation of cards, decorations, tags, bonbons and gift wrap ideas, using a range of mixed media tools and materials.*

*In 2017 I'll be running some more Procion dyeing workshops, for beginners through to advanced and for those who love stitching, there will be an additional project-based Shibori style dyeing workshop, run over two weekends. Dates for all the workshops and upcoming events are listed on page 11 of this newsletter and on the website.*

*The articles in this edition feature some of my favourite things: sewing machines and surface design with a bit of history, inspiration and practical advice mixed in along the way. I hope you enjoy reading the following pages as much as I have enjoyed compiling them.*

*Tina*

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## A Brief History of the Sewing Machine

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Since its early conception in the mid to late 1700s to its eventual patent, manufacture and distribution from the mid nineteenth century, the sewing machine has developed over the years, from a fundamental instrument of textile construction to a refined and technologically creative embroidery tool. It would appear that no single person can be credited with its invention, but rather a number of individuals have been instrumental in its creation, production and development over the years.

One of those individuals was Isaac Merritt Singer, a part-time actor, inventor, repair man and ladies man! He also proved to be an excellent marketer and business man and his legacy in the history



of the sewing machine is probably the most enduring and influential. It was Isaac Singer who promoted the hire purchase scheme to make home sewing machines affordable for women and his sewing machines dominated the market in the early years. The Singer Brand is still going strong 160 years on.

Singer was one of the first mass-produced brands of sewing machines and it is perhaps, still today, one

of the most iconic brands. With its styling and decoration it was a bit of a status symbol in wealthier households, where early machines were displayed more for their appearance, than for their practical use. The stylish art nouveau machines and cabinets were ideal as ornamental pieces of furniture and are still being shown off for their good looks today.

For many women though, these new machines gave them opportunities to explore their creative potential within their own homes. They were now liberated from hours of utility hand sewing, giving them some free time to pursue "hobby" sewing, or even take on extra paid sewing work, thereby contributing to the household income.



Here was something they could legitimately use, not just to make clothes or furnishings for their families, but also to use for their own enjoyment and financial advancement.

Domestic machines were a spin off from the trade and industrial sewing machines of the day. These trade machines were designed to make reproductions of specific types of handstitched work, from whitework to bobbin lace, tambour beading and chain stitching. The obvious advantage to machine stitching was the amount of time that could be saved in the

creation of the design on the fabric. This helped to bring down the cost of embroidered textiles and trimmings, which increased the demand in the marketplace. Alternatively you could say that the demand for more affordable textile goods led to the proliferation of commercial or trade sewing machines.

Although designed to be worked by skilled operators, from embroiders to needle threaders, the early trade sewing machines encountered a lot of resistance from hand workers who feared machines would ultimately take their jobs away and some machines were actively destroyed. In the early 1840s, French inventor and factory owner, Barthelemy Thimonnier had about 80 chain stitch machines in his factory, which produced uniforms for French soldiers. A riotous gang of tailors stormed the factory protesting that he was ruining their livelihoods and promptly wrecked all his machines. He escaped with his life and one machine! Although he tried to make a new start, he never really got going again and ironically, it was the factory owner who was ultimately put out of business by the hand workers. From his early inventions, however, other chain stitch machines were developed and the most enduring is probably the Cornely machine,

which is still used commercially today, but in far less numbers, for chain, moss stitch and cording. The Cornely machines were available as trade and domestic machines and were used to make net curtains, decorative trimmings and decorate shoes, clothes and bags.

Another sewing machine invention which revolutionised the clothing industry was the Schiffler machine. It was an ingenious machine which worked using a pantograph, which traced a small version of a design and then upsized it so that a series of needles and pincers were able to reproduce the design several times over. Beautiful flowing and fast embroidery could be achieved with this machine, as it had the capability to recreate very fine decorative stitching. At first it made only a one-thread chain stitch and later, with modifications, it could use two threads to form a lock stitch and could then reproduce a whole range of embroidery styles. The pantograph was eventually replaced with punch card operation which again improved the quality and the overall output.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the Cornely and Schiffler machines, the other main trade embroidery machine of the day, was Singer's Irish lockstitch machine which

produced similar stitches to our modern straight and zigzag domestic machines. The machine was known as the Irish machine, mainly because of its ability to reproduce the floral whitework of the stitchers in the town of Mountmellick, in Ireland. It was a free motion embroidery machine only, with no feed dogs or presser foot and was only able to work on hooped fabric, stabilised with vanishing muslin.

Singer's domestic sewing machine was similar to the Irish trade machine in that it produced a lockstitch with two threads; one top thread and one bobbin thread. It was much smaller and quieter and therefore ideal for home use, however it didn't have the range or repertoire of the trade machine and could only produce straight stitch. Nineteenth century and early twentieth century domestic machines didn't do zig-zag stitch, as they didn't have swing needles. Nevertheless, a great intricacy and dexterity of stitching was achieved with these machines. One can only imagine how challenging heirloom stitching must have been! We really do have it made today! Now all we have to do is turn a dial, press a button, or programme in a number and the stitch magically appears on the fabric! How convoluted would it have been in

those days to try and recreate satin stitched scallops and motifs on bed and table linen?

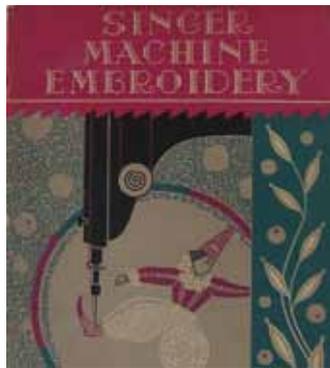
In order to make a zig-zag stitch you physically had to manoeuvre the hooped fabric from side to side. To make a satin stitch (repeated close zig-zag) you'd have to keep your hand-eye coordination working in sync to get the stitches even. The Irish trade machine could work a zig-zag stitch up to half an inch wide, which gave it such enormous potential for free machine embroidery. I can't imagine using a sewing machine today without a built-in zig-zag stitch and I am in awe of those women who created such beautiful satin stitch work, armed with only straight stitch and some clever wrist action with a hoop!

The Irish trade machine was used to further the idea of embroidery as an art form, in the various Singer showrooms, particularly in the early twentieth century. One lady in particular, Dorothy Benson, probably did more for free machine embroidery in that period than any other. Through her work and her teaching she helped countless women achieve their creative potential. She started work in the Singer workroom in London, as a young girl in 1902 and over the years her role evolved from

floor sweeper to machine embroiderer to educator. She learnt how to use the Irish trade machine as though it were a domestic machine and became very skilled with hoop work to create many decorative stitches. From the late 1930s onwards, she was helping to teach not only the new Singer employees, but also teachers of embroidery and home embroiderers. She wrote books, explaining and simplifying the process of machine embroidery, making it more accessible to home sewing enthusiasts. Machine embroidery thrived between the end of the first and start of the second world wars, as women had more time to devote to this pursuit and particularly in the UK, thanks to Dorothy Benson.

Her free motion work was very advanced for its time and she really furthered the idea that free machine embroidery was an art form. Coincidentally she was introduced to artist and designer, Rebecca Crompton who wanted to learn more about the sewing machine. Dorothy Benson taught Rebecca Crompton machine embroidery and often embroidered her designs. Rebecca Crompton went from strength to strength with her free machine stitching. Her work was regularly exhibited and was prominently featured in the notable sewing magazines of the day,

which, along with Dorothy Benson's books, also encouraged interest from a growing band of home machine embroiders.



I was lucky enough to find a copy of Dorothy Benson's first book, "*Singer Machine Embroidery*", at Tyabb Packing House, a few years ago. Not realising the significance of it then and not even having a Singer Sewing machine, I just had to have the book. I loved the look of it and the information inside. It's only recently that I've learnt more about Dorothy Benson and also the history of the early sewing machines. As a result, this book is now a very precious addition to my textile library.



I was talking about Singer sewing machines recently to my friend Jean, who just

happens to have a lovely Singer 201 machine, complete with original user manual. We had great fun checking out all the feet and accessories that she'd managed to acquire for the machine and they too had their own instruction booklets. It was a real treat to see the machine working and we even managed to fit the ruffler and pleat some fabric! So it just shows you these old Singer machines are still going strong today and maybe one day, we might even be tempted to try out Jean's machine and follow the instructions in Dorothy Benson's book for wool embroidery, Broderie Anglaise and fancy stitch fillings!

Gradually as machine embroidery became more popular and, more importantly, an accepted art form, organisations and colleges began to promote it. It was studied not just for trade purposes, but also as an academic art subject in its own right. Creative machine embroidery was

now added to the National Curriculum and more and more courses

and books on the subject became available. I remember the Box Hill Tafe Textiles Diploma Course I took about 8 years ago was originally designed as a creative Studio Stitch course. Sadly, it is now no longer available.

Many artists have turned to the sewing machine to create their work, now using threads and stitches to make their lines and washes. One notable artist, Alice Kettle, is a master of both composition and free machine embroidery and has worked on a variety of commissions including one, "Looking Forwards to the Past", which measures over 16 metres in length and is over 3 metres tall. Her work is often huge in scale and I dread to think how long it must take to fill all the fabric panels with free motion stitches to create such rich, colourful and textured tapestries. Her work reminds me of some of Picasso's paintings in the way she covers the fabric with splashes of colour.

Modern textile artists, such as Jan Beany, Jean Littlejohn, Carol Shin, Sue Stone and Alison Holt are using free machine embroidery to create a variety of works that tell their stories of home, countryside and travel, covering both the exotic and the commonplace. They each have different styles and some may

also use hand stitch to further embellish their work, but every example I see is something to be admired. It doesn't matter how simple or how complicated the final composition is, there is always something so compelling about free machine embroidery that I just love it.

I wonder if those early machine embroiderers ever imagined in their wildest dreams how their domestic sewing machines would evolve? Now we have electronic models which connect to computers, coupled with complex digitising embroidery software. This technology opens up even more creative possibilities, as you can digitise embroidery to make individual designs, repeat patterns and even tapestries. You can even make digitised stitching look like hand stitching or free motion machine stitching. Apart from the time spent designing and building up the stitched motifs on the computer, once the design is complete it can be exactly replicated and stitched out in a fraction of the time. Is it cheating? I don't think so, as the original design has to be imagined and

produced which is all part of the human creative process. We can now take our stitching into any exciting direction we choose, limited only by our imagination and our knowledge of the relevant software.



If you want a more in-depth look at the history and workings of the sewing machine, here's a link to a very informative and amusing set of three You Tube videos:

Part one can be found here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Jbk1uU\\_Jkk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Jbk1uU_Jkk)

## Surface Design Ideas



Surface design is one of those topics that can follow lots of paths. It is too large a subject to cover here in great detail, but I hope to shed some light on what it is, as it pertains to textiles and give some suggestions that you might like to explore further and incorporate into your own work.

What is surface design? It's something we often take for granted and don't really think about. It is

literally what we see when we observe the surface of any textile item from the point of view of such things as line, colour, texture, pattern and now, thanks to computers, digital images. All these things contribute to an item's overall construction or structure, its quality, durability, functionality and aesthetic appeal, which we either like or dislike, according to our own preferences! Think of all the clothes we wear and the furnishing items that we choose for our homes, because we like the way they feel, or how the light reflects off them. We like how warm or cool they are, or they may provoke fond and nostalgic memories. Each item has a surface design that is simple or complex and each one started out as an

idea in someone's head!

Before embarking on any project, surface design is really the first thing we need to think about. In a way we are all designers, as we have to ask the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how? Who is the item for? What is its purpose? When and where will it be worn, used or displayed? Why are we making it? All of these questions will have answers unique to you. When you've answered those questions, you can then decide how you are going to make the item. For example, if you're making a jacket – depending on its intended purpose, are you going to want to sew it out in natural or synthetic fabric? Are you going to use conventionally dyed

fabrics or colour your own? Do you want to decorate it with appliqué elements, beads or stitch? Within these questions, you're also making design decisions about colour, line, shape, pattern and texture

These days, with all the art and craft products available, deciding the exact materials to use for the finish you require gives you a huge range of choices. As we get more knowledgeable and skilled, we tend to make a lot of choices subconsciously, which makes life easier, but if you're new to the concept of surface design, you may not know what is available to you and it can be confusing.

I'll be featuring some of my favourite surface

design techniques and effects, to help you decide what may work for you. If a particular technique appeals to you, it's something you can follow it up in more detail at your leisure.

### Colouring Media - Paints, Pencils, Crayons and Markers

The colour of the fabric surface is important to the overall look you want to achieve and you need to think about the properties of the fibres and how they react to certain dyes, paints or other colouring agents. Are you going to need to constantly wash your work? If not, think of using paints, from watercolours to acrylics or inks and gel markers, watercolour pencils and wax crayons. If you need to wash the fabric – par-



ticularly if it is to be an item of clothing or bed linen, it needs to stand up to a lot of wear and tear and so any surface designs will need to be colourfast, so you could think about adding textile mediums and heat fixing (will your colouring agents respond accordingly?). Alternatively you can use permanent markers, transfer

crayons, or even fibre reactive or transfer dyes, as these will all give colourfast results, without altering the handle or feel of the foundation fabric. I'll talk more about dyes a little later in the article.

Paints usually sit on the surface of the fabric, so whilst they are easy to use and give lots of great effects, remember that they will alter the handle or the feel of the fabric, making it stiffer and less pliable – so not necessarily a good choice for clothing, but fantastic for an art quilt, book cover, box or any item that is designed for a decorative purpose. Acrylic paints are very versatile, in that they can be used thick or thin, added to a thick white primer, such as gesso, or to various texture mediums, they can give coloured 3D effects which are great for stencilling on fabric and also for making fabric collages on canvas.

Undiluted acrylic paints can also be combined with wood blocks and stamps for all over repeat or random surface patterns as they are quite viscous and adhere better than watercolours. In even thicker form they are great for lino and screen printing and, with gelatine or polymer printing plates, they give some great texture effects. When using paints, nearly all plain undyed and commercial fabrics of any fibre content can be your

design base or ground. Good fabric paints include Dynaflo, Setacolor and Lumière, which have some lovely metallic colours.

When using these paints, you can apply loose washes for coloured backgrounds, or be more detailed and create specific shapes or outlines, such as in silk painting. For more precise or line work, you will need to use a resist, such as gutta, to stop the inks or dyes from spreading out beyond the design borders. You can also use water soluble colour pen-



cils, or crayons, which go on dry and then water is applied to blend the colours, to get some lovely subtle soft edges and colour mixes. You will find these with brand names such as Aquarelles, Ink-tense (watercolour pencils) or Gelatos (water soluble crayons). There are even oil-based crayons or pastel-type sticks (Shiva or Markell) on the market, which can give some beautiful metallic effects on dark fabrics and are perfect for rubbings, if you want to get some texture to your designs. These crayons need to be left to fix for

at least 72 hours, before heat setting with an iron, but they should then be waterproof and colourfast thereafter.

Sun Painting is another surface design technique you can use with fabric for adding resist patterns and it's a fun choice if you want to paint outdoors. Objects such as



keys, coins, string or even leaves and cardboard shapes can be laid on the wet painted fabric and left to dry in full sun. Wherever you place those resist objects, you will have a much lighter or whitened out shape where the covered paint has been drawn away by the exposed wet paint drying out in the sun. Here small plastic stars were used over the wet painted background.



## Colouring Media - Dyes

If you want to create your own coloured fabrics to use in dressmaking or for homewares that might need regular washing and also need to be softer to the touch, then fibre reactive dyes or transfer dyes are a more suitable choice, as they will permanently bond with the fabric and, if correctly fixed, will be colourfast. Using dyes as colouring agents is more complicated, but with careful preparation and application, they can give unique and delightful results and can look stunning on silk and cotton. For natural fabrics and fibres, use fibre reactive dyes and for synthetic fibres, such as polyester silk, use disperse or transfer dyes.

There are more safety considerations with dyes than with paints, especially when mixing up dye powders and chemical auxiliaries and I would recommend that you wear a mask, gloves and apron and also use protective coverings, to protect you and your work surfaces. Dyes are not always as easy to clean up as paints.

Fibre reactive dyes need a mordant or fixing agent to make them react and bond with the fabric, so the fabric either has to be pre-treated with the fixing agent (soda ash), or else has to have the soda ash added after the dyes

have been applied. Both ways give slightly different results. Fibre reactive dyes are most commonly available in powder form, and mixed just before application, but you can buy ready-mixed dyes, usually in tie dye kits, if you just want to try out the process.

This is one of my favourite surface design techniques and I have four workshops planned next year to teach the many ways you can use these fibre reactive dyes, so if it is something that appeals, please visit the website to see what techniques are being offered.

Disperse dyes work in a slightly different way to fibre reactive dyes in that they are not directly applied to the fabric, but are used to first make the design onto a transfer sheet (hence they are also known as transfer dyes) such as copy or cartridge paper. These dyes are



available in powder form or come ready-mixed in a bottled solution, in various pre-mixed colours. Colours can be further mixed to suit. These dyes are fixed with heat and so when the paper sheet is

laid dye colour side down onto a synthetic fabric and dry ironed, the colour and design will be transferred from the paper to the fabric. For a specific design, such as lettering or someone's name, the design will first need to be reversed on the paper, otherwise it will come out backwards!

Disperse dyes can be used like paints and applied as a wash all over the paper, or you can draw specific designs or make repeat patterns. You can cut out painted paper shapes and iron those onto the fabric and you can also use plain paper shapes as masks, which can then act as a resist to the dye paper sheet. Wherever the fabric is covered by plain paper, the dye colour will not be transferred onto it, which can give some lovely negative space designs, rather like the sun printing.

Most of the paints and dyes I've talked about are available from online outlets, such as Kraftcolour or in some of the Riot Art, Lincraft and Spotlight stores.

For a completely eco friendly alternative to colouring cloth, natural dyeing offers a unique way of creating surface design colours, prints and patterns with plants. I've discussed this quite extensively in previous articles and on the website, so if this is some-

thing that appeals to you, have a look at those



articles, or see details of the upcoming eco-dyeing workshops at the end of this newsletter.

## Digital Media

For those of you who are not into getting messy with paints or dyes, you can use a computer and printer to make digital surface design prints. You can buy printer transfer sheets onto which you can print your computerised design or photo and then iron it onto your fabric. This method is often used to add surface design to tee shirts or canvas items. Again, the printed image will be reversed when you dry iron it to the fabric, so bear this in mind for specific designs. All the instructions usually come with the pack of transfer sheets and you usually get between 5 and 10 in a packet. They are available at Office Works. They are easy to use and are okay for wearable items, but they can leave a bit of a residue around the image. Once transferred and after washing, they are tricky to iron, as they will always be a little bit

tacky, so place a non-stick covering over them while pressing.

You can now also buy fabric that is cut into A4 or A3 sheets, that can be placed into the feeder tray of your printer to take any digital image, rather like you would print on a piece of paper. The fabric can be cotton, linen, silk or organza and will have a backing sheet on it, which acts as the stiffener or carrier sheet to make the fabric pass smoothly through the printer without snagging. It is more expensive than the tee shirt transfer paper, but it is more instant. You can pre-treat the fabric with an ink fixing agent, such as Bubble Jet Set, to make the ink water-resistant, but if it's for an art piece it's not really necessary. You can also make your own fabric sheets and your own stiffener/fixer, but I wouldn't recommend it, especially if you have an expensive printer. However, if you're game, google Bubble Jet Set Australia to explore the possibilities!

Both the tee shirt transfer paper and direct fabric computer print methods will allow you to print your photographs and text onto fabric, which is great for doing bag or memory quilt projects. You can easily print professional-looking calligraphic fonts and use all sorts of different typography which is very much

on trend at the moment. Pieces or images can be cut out from the printed fabric and used as appliqué elements on other pieces of clothing or textile projects.

If you have a program such as Photoshop or Illustrator, you can then manipulate photographs and create your own images and play with colour combinations digitally. Taking this even further, if you're into making your own digital patterns, there is a company called Spoonflower who will commercially print them onto fabric for you, so you can in effect design your very own repeat yardage or metreage and even sell it online!

### **Stitch and surface design embellishment**

We haven't even discussed stitch yet or other embellishing ideas which can be used alone or in conjunction with dyes, paints and digital printing. There are endless options for surface design with stitch, whether it's by machine or hand. Stitch can be contemporary or traditional and you can add as much of it or as little as you wish. Sites, such as DMC Threads have pages of embroidery instructions if you want to learn how to do some of the more fancy stitch designs. Just by varying thread colours, types and weights you will get very different looks.

Hand stitches tend to be classified as line or outline stitches, such as running stitch; edging or border stitches, such as blanket stitch; filling stitches, such as seed stitch; or decorative, stand-alone stitches, such as lazy daisy. However, one type of stitch can be used in several ways. For example, my favourite, chain stitch could be used as a decorative edging for non-fraying fabric, as an outline around appliqué elements, or as a shape-filling stitch by stitching lots of chain lines close together. This can look very effective if using variegated threads.



quite know what else to do! It always looks good, particularly when sewn in dense swathes across a fabric in toning or contrast colours. It can be used as a single stitch or several stitches side by side.

Working with a sewing machine you have a range of different feet that can be used for surface embellishment, such as fringing, fagoting, scalloping, cording and braiding. Stitching around the edge of pieced fabrics, either as appliqués or over seam lines, can give a real heirloom or vintage look to a quilt, blanket or jacket.



Thicker threads and even knitting yarns can be couched by thinner ones to give soft, meandering lines to denote movement or coiled around to give decorative shapes and then further stitched into for even more texture. Running stitch is another great way to bring a dynamic element to your work, as it will direct your eye around the design and is an easy stitch to start with. Seed stitch, a disconnected running stitch, is something you can use when you don't

Both hand and machine stitching can be even further embellished with beads, jewels, buttons, metal objects, laces and ribbons etc. to give a very luxurious and highly textured surface.

Manipulating or engineering new fabric structures with stitch is another possibility to bring added texture to your work and again can be quite complex, such as smocking, tucking, making ruffles and pleats; or relatively simple, by

gathering lengths of fabric with thread or elastic. These manipulation techniques can be very exciting as surface design on plain fabrics, as they may reflect light and create shadows to give a variety of forms and patterns. Fabric embellishments can be applied to the base or ground fabric as 3D decorative elements for highly textured surface designs.

### Surface Design - Distortion

Fabrics can be sewn, glued, fused or heated to create distortion, permanent shrinkage, curls, creases, and holes, all of which can look spectacular on fashion garments, wall-hangings, art dolls and quilts. Synthetic fabrics such as polyester silk organza and craft materials such as Tyvek and Lutradur are particularly good for creating distortion and 3D forms, as they respond really well to heat. They don't burn, but melt and shrink all over to give holes and crinkled edges that could then be stitched, glittered, painted or foiled to emulate all sorts of organic forms.

For yet more organic and textured surface designs, wet or dry felting techniques can be used. Tufts of silk and wool roving can be worked into overall colour or pattern elements, giving beautiful, soft and tactile possibili-



ties for clothing, homewares and decorative artware. If this is something that interests you, do come and see the studio foyer display in November at the Peninsula Arts Society, as there will be a range of felted designs on show, highlighting the great versatility of this particular surface design medium.

Phew! Now you can understand why surface design is limitless and open to infinite interpretations! Don't be overwhelmed though, just start out by working with whatever materials and tools you have to hand and play to see what possibilities you can achieve. The only rules are safety rules, making sure if you use dyes and chemicals, you follow manufacturer's instructions and check out the related materials safety data sheets(MSDS). If you use heat tools, do so in a well ventilated space and have a glass mat handy to set down your hot fabrics and resting soldering iron.

I'll be exploring a selection of the above ideas in more detail in some later website

tutorials and will keep you posted when they're available. In the meantime, have fun creating your own favourite surface designs!

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## Practical Free Machine Embroidery

### Part 1 - Straight Stitch

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When you're first starting out with free machine embroidery, it's always a bit scary to imagine how you are going to control the machine without it running away from you and trying to do its own thing! Samplers are a good way to get going and also to chart your progress, as you can practise on several scraps of fabric and see how you improve on each one as you go along.

As only you will see what you sew, it really doesn't matter what the samplers look like and if you don't like them at all, it's only fabric that you can throw in the bin or use as a polishing cloth! However, after the first few you'll find that you begin to like what you're sewing and you'll want to keep them

as a reference for future ideas and projects.

For this article's sampler (I've actually done a few for some variations), we'll start with straight or line stitch, as line is one of the key elements of art and design and you can convey so much with it. It can be used to indicate direction or movement, a physical characteristic, or it can be used to outline or emphasise a particular shape and it can also be used repeatedly as a shape fill. The machine embroidered sampler is akin to a page in a sketchbook full of doodles, drawings or writing.

If you stitch the line only once, it will be thin, quite scratchy and understated, but in going over and over the line you give it more volume and dynamism.

There may be times when you want to be very accurate and go over the same line exactly, or you can be more spontaneous and go over a shape several times with the lines slightly away from each other or overlapping. This can look really effective, especially when combined with appliquéd fabrics underneath the stitching. Free machine embroidery is a great tool for writing, doodling or sketching. You can stitch a line over a pre-drawn image, which is sometimes a good way to start out, or you can just go straight into stitching on a blank piece of fabric and just see where the sketching or doodling line can take you.

For free motion work your machine manual will give you the correct set up and foot attachment advice for your particular make and model and I've listed below the main steps to work through, to get started.

1. Ensure your machine is free of lint in the hook race (where the bobbin is housed) and has a new needle fitted (e.g. size 11, 12 or 14).
2. Fix the correct free motion foot and thread the top needle, as per your machine manual.
3. Use whatever thread you have (e.g. cotton, polyester or rayon) for top and bobbin threads –

any colours are fine.

4. Lower or cover the feed dogs of the machine (as per your manual instructions).

5. Adjust your stitch length to zero (you will control the stitch length with your hand and foot movements. Moving the hoop quite rapidly will create longer lines, and moving the hoop slowly will give you very tiny stitches, so you can play with lengths in between).

6. Tightly hoop up some calico or similar weight cotton fabric together with tearaway stabilizer, in a wooden embroidery hoop that is small enough to glide freely within the throat of the machine, but large enough that you can sew for a while without having to keep re-hooping the fabric. The hoop



will be flat on the sewing machine and the sides will be uppermost, so that you are sewing inside the hoop, on the flat bit (i.e. using it the opposite way to hand embroidery).

7. Lift the presser foot and carefully place the hoop underneath ensuring it moves freely.

8. Lightly hold each

side of the hoop, between the thumb and forefinger of each hand and practise manoeuvring it left and right and up and down. (I personally prefer to work without a hoop and with gripping gloves, holding the fabric taut, but when you start out, using a hoop is less straining on your hands. Do what feels most comfortable for you).

9. Lower the presser foot and draw up the bobbin thread by lowering the needle and raising it again (either manually or using needle up/needle down button).

10. Take the end of the bobbin thread and the top thread under the presser foot towards the back of the machine and hold them down as you slowly begin to sew. This will stop the loose threads from snagging at the start, securing them in place.

11. Stop sewing after a few stitches to snip the excess thread.

12. Resume sewing and concentrate on your foot pedal movement and your hand/hoop movement.

13. Hands should be relaxed, but in control and your foot should be relaxed and fully pressed down on the pedal if you have a motion control slider on the machine. If not, you will need to con-

trol the machine speed by varying your foot pressure up and down. Keep everything working at a slow to steady pace to start with – don't accelerate the speed until you can smoothly co-ordinate your hand and foot movement.

14. Ideally, you should sit up as straight as possible when working, but it's very easy to hunch over when you get engrossed in your stitching. To counteract this, take regular breaks, stand up, walk about and stretch out any tension in your shoulders and hands. Making a cup of tea really helps!



### Non-structured sampler

Begin with a blank piece of stabilized fabric and just stitch lines moving backwards and forwards and then side to side. When you are happy that your lines are looking reasonably fluid, try stitching your name. The more times you try the neater it will look. From there you might want to try stitching out some organic shapes and circles, as curves are easier to free motion stitch than straight lines when

you first start out. Progress to more geometric shapes, such as triangles, rectangles or even hexagons – this will test your hand-eye co-ordination and your concentration!

### Structured sampler

For those who like more structured samplers, sew a straight grid first on your fabric, using your



normal straight stitch foot, with feed dogs engaged. (I chose a 10 x 10 inch grid which gave 25 x 2 inch square boxes). Try working on themes, starting with a simple line: straight, squiggly, jagged, circular,

horizontal, vertical and so on and then you can further develop ideas as you progress along each column and row. It does become addictive after a while and don't worry if you start stitching outside the squares - it means you're getting confident and having fun!

### Developed Doodle and Sketch Samplers



For further ideas, think about developing some of your doodles or sketches and playing around with different colour threads to make more complex samplers and start to build on your techniques. Varying the movement of the hoop will give all sorts of great textural lines too and these will be very useful references if

you ever want to try out machine embroidered landscapes or portraits.

If this interests you, there will be some related textile talks and tutorials on the website coming up, so keep an eye out for What's New.

Until then, happy free motion stitching!



## Workshop News

### November 2016 – April 2017

**Saturday, 19th and Sunday, 20th November 2016 or**

**Saturday 26th and Sunday, 27th November 2016**

Natural Dyeing With Plants

2 day workshop: Beginners

**Saturday, 3rd and Sunday, 4th December 2016**

Cutting It Fine For Christmas - Papercraft

2 day workshop: All Levels

**Saturday 7th and Sunday 15th January 2017**

Natural Dyeing With Plants

2 day workshop: Advanced

**Saturday, 21st and Sunday, 22nd January 2017**

Understanding Colour With Fibre Reactive Dyes

2 day workshop: Beginners

**Saturday, 18th and Sunday 19th February 2017**

Controlling Colour Using Fibre Reactive Dyes

2 day workshop: Beginners

**Saturday, 18th and Saturday, 25th March 2017**

Stitch, Fold, Tie, Dye

2 day workshop: Intermediate to Advanced

**Saturday, 15th and Sunday 16th April 2017**

Sampler Selection With Fibre Reactive Dyes

2 day workshop: Intermediate to Advanced

For more information about these and other workshops between now and April 2017, please visit the Workshop page on the website or email me if you have any queries.

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**Diary of Events****September 2016 – January 2017**

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**21st September 2016 – 22nd January 2017**

Kylie on Stage

Arts Centre Melbourne 100 St Kilda Road

For more details:

<https://www.artscentremelbourne.com.au/whats-on/2016/exhibitions/kylie-on-stage>

**30th September 2016 – 29th January 2017**

Italian Jewels Bulgari Style

NGV Australia, St Kilda Road, Level 3

Open 10 am – 5 pm

For more details:

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/italian-jewels/>

**1st – 31st October 2016**

Peninsula Arts Society Art and Textiles Display

Frankston Visitor Centre Window

**29th October – 1st November 2016**

Peninsula Arts Society Annual Spring Art Show

159 Overport Road Frankston

Open 10 am - 5 pm

**1st - 30th November 2016**

Kangaroo Paw Celebration

Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria's Cranbourne Gardens

For more details:

<http://www.gardeningwithangus.com.au/kangaroo-paw-celebration-cranbourne-gardens-november/>